

RESIDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT : EXIT, VOICE AND LOYALTY IN SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNS

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, local government policy in South Africa has proposed a greater degree of local democracy and a greater degree of local public participation. The latter, captured under the phrase 'developmental local government', promises local residents engagement as voters, as citizens affected by local government policy and as partners in resource mobilisation for the development of the municipal area. Qualitative fieldwork in a number of small towns in the Western Cape conducted in 2000 revealed no common sense of loyalty toward the town or its local government. Socio-economic (more than ethnic) identity marked differences in orientation. The middle income minority engaged both the local council and its municipality in a relationship of loyalty and criticism whilst both the affluent as well as the poor had withdrawn from local civil society.

INTRODUCTION

Local government reform in South Africa has, over the past decade, passed through two analytically distinct phases of policy. The first after the local government elections in 1995 and 1996 established *local democracy* (see Bekker et al 1997, Götz 1995, Graham 1995). The second enunciated particularly in the White Paper on Local Government (1998) established *developmental* local government which emphasized *participative planning* and local *economic* initiatives as pre-eminent local government goals (*Development Southern Africa* 1998, MPACD 1998). A third set of policies which is emerging at the time of writing (2001), has been preceded by a country-wide re-delimitation of areas of jurisdiction and promises more *effective* and more *equitably financed* local governments (see Bernstein & Clynick 2000, Heymans 2000, Pillay 2000)

Within the context of these two first phases of policy reform, the aim of this paper is to scrutinize ways in which rank-and-file groups of residents experience their local

conditions. Earlier work by the authors completed in 1999 identified the 'local' (in contradistinction to the provincial or the national or the international) as primary in imparting meaning to these residents. We wrote at the time that '(p)oliticians and opinion-makers appear mesmerised by grand images - the nation, the province, the continent. South Africans draw meaning from humbler sources - village, suburb, language, minority group. Government action in these spheres is of far greater importance than is generally realised' (Bekker et al 2000). This paper will first outline local government policy in terms of its intended influence on the lives of rank-and-file residents. The focus will be on the *participative* and *developmental* aspects of this policy and on strategies proposed by this policy to achieve these. Subsequently, by using data generated in the same way as for the earlier study, we will describe shared meanings which different groups of residents assign to these strategies. This will reveal the differing ways in which groups of local people experience and react to the implementation of developmental local government. Explanations will then be suggested for these experiences and reactions.

As used in South Africa, local government is an umbrella concept. It includes metropolitan government as well as public bodies responsible for settlements ranging from cities to small towns and their hinterlands. Not only do circumstances differ widely across such forms of local government but also with regard to where within the South African space economy these cities and towns are located (see Cameron 1999). Four towns have been selected for this study. They are all located within the Western Cape, a province enjoying the highest provincial Human Development Index in South Africa (Moller 2000). Two are within the economically vibrant immediate hinterland of Cape Town, and the other two in the more arid and less economically developed West Coast and (eastern) Overberg districts of the province. Afrikaans is the majority language in each of these four towns.

However, three advantages flow from this selection. In the first place, as will be shown below, a primary strand of developmental local government policy is integrated development planning. For more than two years, the Western Cape Provincial Administration and its District Councils have been implementing this policy, *inter alia*, in the districts within which the four towns fall.¹ In the second place, since two of the four towns are relatively better-off, and two relatively worse off, rank-and-file groups selected as respondents include individuals covering the spectrum of unemployment and employment, as well as blue and white collar jobs. The third advantage is that earlier research work using the same methodology was undertaken in the same province and the two sets of data are consequently comparable.

Research was qualitative and involved a series of focus group discussions with rank-and-file groupings in the four towns. Each focus group was requested to discuss how they 'felt' about living in their local residential area, in the Western Cape, and in South Africa. Discussions were conducted in the preferred language of each group and transcriptions were subsequently translated into English for analysis. The three research prompts and subsequent non-directive facilitation of discussion were

deliberately chosen to enable groups freely to probe areas of shared meaning. Since focus groups were not asked to debate issues directly related to local government policy or practice, identification and discussion of such issues produces evidence of shared sentiments regarding the importance of local government. Subsequent analysis of the narratives within which these shared sentiments were located led to an interpretation of the relative importance of the local in comparison with the provincial and the national (see Appendix 1).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

In the wider context of South African public policy, local government's place has changed dramatically since the 1994 general elections. This change is associated with changing state strategy toward its primary policy objective of development. In 1993, it had been decided that a lengthy process of local level negotiations ratified by the nine newly-elected provincial governments needed to take place before local elections could be held. In effect, political transition at local level was delayed. Local government - the third tier - was considered as insignificant, in the words of a commentator at the time, as the 'loser' (Christianson 1994). Development was to be achieved via the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and was to be implemented from above.

Failure of the RDP promoted the idea of decentralisation. Simultaneously, the 1996 South African Constitution inaugurated the idea of cooperative government in which local, provincial and national governments are defined as spheres (rather than as the more traditional tiers), and between which coordination and cooperation are encouraged. The Constitution also defined the developmental role that municipalities are required to play, a role beyond simple service delivery. Municipalities are expected to give priority to the basic needs of, and promote the social and economic development of, the 'community'. In 1998, with the launch of the White Paper on Local Government, development was firmly located within the local sphere. Integrated development planning (IDP) is the central strategy to this end. IDP will be the instrument to identify and prioritise the basic needs of communities, and will also enable municipalities to manage both horizontal as well as vertical programmes aimed at social and economic development.

No longer the insignificant lowest tier, local government now appears to be on centre stage, playing an increasingly crucial role in state-led development. In the words of the (then) Deputy Director-General responsible for local government in 1998, 'South Africa is currently undergoing a major change within its public sector, in which government functions, virtually across the board, are being decentralised to local level' (Olver 1998: 289) and, in the words of the responsible Minister, 'in terms of the new constitution, local government is a sphere of government in its own right and no longer a function of national or provincial government' (Ministry of Provincial Affairs 1998: i).

Integrated development planning implies participative planning, in particular,

planning with a range of institutions in civil society. In the White Paper, this element of the process is considered crucial to development. Justification for participative planning as an imperative is motivated in the White Paper. In the section (3.3) entitled 'Working together with local citizens and partners', the following words are employed :

One of the strengths of integrated development planning is that it recognises the linkages between development, delivery and democracy. Building local democracy is a central role of local government, and municipalities should develop strategies and mechanisms (including, but not limited to, participative planning) to continuously engage with citizens, business and community groups.

Municipalities require active participation by citizens at four levels:

- As voters - to ensure maximum democratic accountability of the elected political leadership for the policies they are empowered to promote.
- As citizens who express, via different stakeholder associations, their views before, during and after the policy development process in order to ensure that policies reflect community preferences as far as possible.
- As consumers and end-users, who expect value-for-money, affordable service and courteous and responsive service.
- As organised partners involved in the mobilisation of resources for development via for-profit businesses, non-governmental organisations and community-based institutions.

Shortly after the publication of this White Paper, an influential weekly newspaper commented that '(m)unicipal councils will ... have to facilitate a culture of public service among staff' and '(c)ouncils will have to build the capacity of residents and communities to participate in the affairs of the municipality' (Streek 1999).

In summary, public policy designed to deliver developmental local government proposes an ongoing relationship of cooperation and conflict in the local sphere between state and civil society.² Local residents are expected to participate in this relationship through the vote (as individuals), through organised pressure on their municipality to express preferences and complaints (as members of stakeholder associations), through expressions of dissatisfaction over service delivery (as consumers), and through public-private partnerships aimed at development (as businesses, NGOs and CBOs).

Do these four types of relationship exhaust the options local residents have to act publicly at local level? An answer may be found by asking what people do when they experience decline in the organisations within which they operate? This is the

question Hirschman posed in his book *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970, for a critique see Barry 1974). His answer is that people have one of three options: they can grin and bear it, simply stick it out; they can express their dissatisfaction in the hope that this may improve the situation; or they can quit and seek another organisation. These three options relate to the ideas of loyalty, voice, and exit. Hirschman claims that this simple model may be applied to private business firms and to public state organisations alike.

Accordingly, we view the policy summarized above as offering local people the opportunity to belong to civil society, and from that basis to express loyalty or voice, support for or resistance to, municipal activities. What this policy aims to avoid is exit where local people do not perceive themselves as belonging to civil society and where they opt for activities and identities beyond the state-civil society nexus. It is along these lines that we will explore below the experiences of three groups of local residents in our sample.

THE SAMPLE

Twelve focus group (FG) discussions were organised. In order to ensure a range of relevant characteristics in the sample, selection of groups was guided by variations in spatial location and in the nature of the group's residential area. Two towns close to Cape Town, Paarl-Wellington and Stellenbosch, and two towns in more rural surroundings, Heidelberg in the southern Cape and Vredendal on the West Coast were selected. During the fieldwork period, the Local Councils of all four towns were governed by party political coalitions, and Mayors in three of the four were Independents, reflecting the outcome of coalition politics.

Four groups were selected from former Coloured Group Areas (Wellington Coloured and Kylemore, Heidelberg Coloured and Vredendal North); four in informal settlements within these towns (Mbekweni and Oliver Tambo in Paarl-Wellington, Heidelberg Black and Avila Park in Vredendal); one from a former Black Group Area (Kayamandi in Stellenbosch) and three from former White Group Areas (Heidelberg White, Stellenbosch White and Strandfontein, close to Vredendal). Table 1 below reflects this selection.

Table 1:
Location, classification and composition of Focus Groups (FGs)

	Poor		Middle Income		Affluent
Race	Black	Coloured	Black	Coloured	White
Housing	Informal settlement	Formal housing	Formal housing	Formal housing	Formal housing
Greater Cape Town	1 Mbekweni (Paarl) 9 unemployed 1 blue-collar employed 2 Oliver Tambo (Wellington) 6 unemployed		1 Kayamandi (Stellenbosch) 3 white-collar employed, 1 pensioner	1 Wellington 9 teachers or retired teachers 2 Kylemore (Stellenbosch) 4 white-collar employed, 2 housewives	1 Stellenbosch 1 business, 3 housewives
Distant hinter-Land Of Cape Town	3 Avila Park (Vredendal) 10 unemployed 4 Heidelberg 5 unemployed, 1 pensioner, 1 scholar	1 Vredendal North 6 unemployed, 1 informal sector 2 Heidelberg 2 unemployed, 3 blue-collar workers, 1 scholar			2 Strandfontein (West Coast) 3 white-collar, 1 housewife 3 Heidelberg 3 white-collar employed
Total	4	2	1	2	3

Classification into the three socio-economic groups used in this Table - poor, middle income and affluent - was made after a preliminary analysis of FG data. As we will show below, there are striking similarities in FG narratives within these three groups. These similarities moreover cross over racial differences in the first two groups. By 'poor', we mean local people who are overwhelmingly unemployed and who speak of themselves as chronically poor. By 'middle income', we mean local people who are either employed in white collar (or established blue collar) positions or who are able to remain at home since there is a household member in such a position. The middle income group all live in formal dwellings. The 'affluent' are Afrikaans-speaking established white local people of the selected towns. FG participants were chosen from middle class residents found in these towns.

Research on social identity has shown that people construct various individual and group identities for themselves. These identities are sometimes in internal tension with one another. For an individual or group to act upon some of these identities probably frustrates others (Calhoun 1995). We hypothesise, accordingly, that under specific circumstances, a *primary* identity (one that is 'given priority over other sources of meaning' (Castells 1997:6)) will emerge to prevail over others. One way to identify the growing dominance of one identity over others is to detect and describe common identity narratives used by individuals and groups and thereby to infer which is being

promoted. Such narratives contained in the material gathered during the twelve focus group sessions have been carefully analysed with this objective in mind.

Two criteria were used to guide these narrative analyses. Though the FG group discussions differed from one another, they all included, as a common feature, discussions of concerns shared with other people. These concerns moreover were typically geographically located and linked with one of the three spheres of government introduced by the three probes. In most cases, such discussion included references to cause and effect and to possible resolution of these concerns. Such a strand of a FG discussion was defined as a narrative since it was both coherent and presented as meaningful to all members of the FG. The second criterion was the frequency that certain narratives appeared both within FG discussions as well as within FG classes.

THE AFFLUENT

Affluent FG participants very seldom refer to local municipal and political issues. What is of meaning to them locally are issues relating to quality of life, such as the beauty of the environment or the level of social interaction. 'It is very quiet here but it's nice for the children' (STW)³; 'It is beautiful here but (...) I hate to see Stellenbosch being dirty all over. They should pay someone to sweep the streets' (SW); and 'We are from the *platteland*... We are different, we are country-like people. We think more in terms of the nature, the lifestyle. Quality of life is more important than the money we have in the bank. Here in Heidelberg, what I experienced is personal courtesy and friendly people' (HW).

Political meaning is derived from national issues and economic concerns are also stated at national level. 'There is a lot of (lottery) money that is collected ... for welfare ... but the money doesn't reach those needs' (STW). '(T)he race convention in Pretoria was a big bluff ... this is the big thing that worries me in this country' (STW). 'The thing that the (state president) said about AIDS, the man sounds like a proper lunatic' (SW). 'I am concerned that our president has such a very peculiar attitude towards the farm crisis in Zimbabwe' (SW). 'I cannot be very positive (about the economy). It will soon have to hit the bottom' (HW).

The only shared concern of direct local institutional significance was crime. The role of police in crime prevention however was not raised by any affluent FG. Rather, individual solutions notably through privatised security were raised in each of the three FGs. 'I am prepared to share with you very good and proven ideas on how to be safe' (SW). Self-defence through erecting fences around houses was proposed by another participant as the best option. In the Strandfontein and Heidelberg FGs, moving to a safer area was proposed as an alternative means to escape crime.

The focus on national political issues is partially explicable by the period during which the FGs took place - the second half of 2000. This period was a particularly bad one for the national and international image of the presidency and the national cabinet.

An influential South African daily recently put it as follows :

The truth is that Mbeki himself, who succeeded the charismatic Nelson Mandela 18 months ago, has stumbled badly this year both as a politician and a diplomat. First he alienated allies at home and abroad with eccentric statements questioning the link between HIV and AIDS, a stance that undermined efforts to combat the epidemic in South Africa. Then he was condemned for his apparently feeble and indecisive response to the political crisis in neighbouring Zimbabwe (*Business Day* 27 November 2000).

Accordingly, in their roles as voters, citizens and consumers, affluent FG participants draw meaning from national rather than local (or provincial) issues. Though not in name, it is clear that the ANC ('the governing party') is widely held as responsible for much of the country's malaise (or for their discontent). Corruption, inefficiency, and reverse discrimination were raised as examples in FG discussions. As consumers, national rather than local state services are identified for criticism. Among grievances shared by all participants, personal tax raised for tertiary education and state hospitalisation was targeted. In short, 'as you can see from our situation, it goes right into politics so you can see what is really close to our hearts' (SW), an opinion confirmed in Heidelberg: 'I think all the people...they have a certain mind-shift. I think what worries them most is the economy and security (situation) and now we're starting to talk politics'.

A major issue at national level was the protection of Afrikaner identity which was clearly articulated in all FGs in terms of both language (Afrikaans) and religion (Christianity). '(O)ne can build a very beautiful future in this country if you recognise the differences in the concepts of identity and ethnicity. This does not mean that we have to go back to the old apartheid system' (HW). 'Religion is very much part of our culture' (SW). 'I would like that my children one day get married in a Dutch Reformed church' (STW). Accordingly, mobilisation within community was stated in ways associated with the Afrikaner group: 'As an Afrikaans South African, I feel that my language is being suppressed ... (T)his is a challenge to work for our language, to build a future with that language included in it' (SW). '(I)t would be our fault if it (our language) dies, we will then have let it die' (HW).

Another reaction to the wide-ranging sense of discontent with state activities expressed by respondents in all three groups was that of [white] emigration which, though distasteful, emerged as an implicit last alternative. 'I hate to think that I am going to lose another child to the foreigners. I already gave up one' (SW). '(T)he children feel they don't have a future in South Africa. The majority of the children plan on going overseas' (STW). '(M)y son is going overseas and I can't stop him as his job is threatened' (HW).

THE POOR

In direct contrast to affluent people, the poor are local people *par excellence*. While provincial and national issues are seldom mentioned, the poor centre their narratives on local problems and institutions. They seem to draw little meaning in their daily lives from the national sphere. Responses to the probe 'how do you feel about living in SA' ranged from 'about SA, I am still thinking' to 'I am satisfied but I am doubting'. Opinions on South Africa included 'SA is better than before but in my area there is nothing better at all' (AP) and 'as far as the new SA is concerned, there is no change here' (HB).

Consequently the main focus of their narratives was the area where they stay. As one respondent in Oliver Tambo stated: 'we have problems with the area here only'. Their 'area' moreover is typically much more confined than the town within which they live. In fact, this area is often compared negatively to the surrounding town. 'I don't feel right or well in this place and the way we are treated here is totally unfair for us' (HC). 'This area is dirty. It causes diseases. There are no pre-schools, no children centres. The services are only in town, in Vredendal and you must pay for the taxi' (AP). 'We have no services, no electricity, no water, even the collecting of dirt is bad...Services are much better in town. The only neglected place is our place' (OT). In Vredendal-North, this sense of exclusion and allied resentment was expressed in the following terms: 'Theoretically we are part of the town but not practically. When we lived in the old part of Vredendal, we lived next to the rubbish dump, the sewage dump and the aerodrome. When we moved to Vredendal-North, suddenly they found a suitable place here for the rubbish dump, the sewage dump and the aerodrome... In other words, you are the so-called coloured and you will stay where you are, you stay on the hill and in the dusty part of town'.

This local identity is defined in race as well as class terms. Local leadership is accused of discrimination on both grounds. Respondents in three of the four poor black FGs feel they are discriminated against by their municipality who are perceived to favour coloureds when it comes to employment (HB, OT, AP), to housing and services in general (OT, AP) as well as to schooling (AP). In Heidelberg, 'the local government is not working with us, that is as black people. There was casual work at the municipality. We were employed there but we only worked for two days. But we discovered that coloured people were still working there until now... At the municipality administration, you never see black staff members, the administration is full of white and coloured people' (HB). Talking about the new houses that have been built, in Oliver Tambo 'if you compare our situation with coloured people, they have better houses with three or four rooms'. In Vredendal-North racial discrimination by the council was described as follows 'the municipality in Vredendal, they use nice words like 'previously disadvantaged'...but they don't recognise us. When you are in a certain group, they protect you but we as 'previously disadvantaged people' are not protected'.

Discrimination is also perceived to result from corruption and nepotism. 'In the new local government they practice nepotism, they appoint their own families. They will ask you where you come from in the municipality offices, they will ask you whether

you're born here or not, if you are not born here, there is no way you can get a job...so there is apartheid among black people now. What they are doing now, they oppress poor people. Poor people become poorer and the rich become richer' (MB). A similar statement was made in Vredendal, where it was stated that 'the land that the local government gave us is too small for our (extended) families but the land that they assign for themselves is big... They themselves have big estates' (AP). While in Vredendal-North, 'some streets (in the area) have good services, streets where people in top positions live like ANC or SACP. Those people who have high profiles in top structures, their streets are tarred'.

Contrary to the affluent who draw meaning from cultural identities, for the poor, belonging to community is largely experienced as a local bond. Other than the Xhosa language which is experienced as a disadvantage in the job market, no meaning appears to have been drawn from Xhosa ethnic identity. Similarly, though Coloured identity was mentioned in both FGs, these references were made in order to distinguish between White, Black and Coloured and were stated without pride. No reference was made to the Afrikaans language.

Local bonding and meanings drawn from local residential area are associated with high expectations about municipality performance. These range from asking for help to finish a roof to fighting alcohol abuse, from helping a small entrepreneur start a business to addressing the ubiquitous unemployment problem. The municipality (rather than national or provincial bodies) is held accountable for all such problems. Citizenship and the state are both considered to be local and, accordingly, local problems call for local solutions. This orientation however deeply disappoints. '(T)he local government is the closest to us but we see it as a government that is far away' (AP). Indeed, while the council and municipality figure prominently and clearly in group narratives - laying to rest the perception that the poor are ill-informed of local government functions - the outcome is widespread shared disillusionment.

As voters, the poor are neglected

Disillusionment is not explicitly linked to a political party. Rather, 'leaders' are distrusted. 'Our opinions are not listened by the leaders' (AP). 'Those who are in charge of finances are only concerned about their self-interests ; they do not care about us on the ground' so 'now we are confused who to vote for in the place where I stay' (HB). 'The (politicians) come here for their own purposes' (VN).

In Oliver Tambo, 'The person who is looking after our ward in the municipality must come down to see the needs of the people. We are not satisfied with his work'; in Heidelberg-Coloured, 'The leaders don't walk in the streets, from house to house to ask what people want and what people need'. 'I am like a child, they tell me to go and play outside when I am in their way. The council is playing with me but when they need me, I must go and vote for them' (VN). It is not surprising then that a respondent concluded that 'I can't vote because I am the victim of a bad situation' (AP).

As citizens, the poor are ignored and their complaints not addressed

‘The local government treat us like ‘cows’. I appeal to the local government to think about us. We want more rights, we must work together in co-operation but the local government is unfaithful to us’ (AP). ‘When you go to the municipality with a problem, they treat you like a dog treats a cat. They are always fighting’ and ‘when you lay some issues on the table for the council, the moment you turn your back, your suggestions are thrown in the rubbish bin’ (VN). ‘(T)he informal settlement is in bad condition but if you go and report it, no one does anything’ (MB).

The only reference to attempts at organised civil participation were made in the Vredendal-North FG: ‘Here we have a housing problem but the organisation that takes the initiative to address this problem is not recognised by the local government’ and ‘the services the community needs were named in a ... meeting, they (the council) didn’t look at those needs. The council does not listen to what the community needs, they only do what they want to do’.

As consumers, the poor are deeply dissatisfied and struggle to pay

Unemployment is experienced as more pressing than the quality of municipal service delivery. The municipality is perceived both as a potential source of work as well as a potential job creation institution. It is severely criticised on both counts. ‘When it comes to problems like unemployment, the council doesn’t recognise us, we just have to stay where we are’ (VN). ‘(T)here is not one job-creation project organised by the municipality that is still operating’ (HC).

Complaints regarding municipal service delivery revolve largely around basic services such as hygiene, refuse removal and sanitation. As mentioned above, the perception that their area is discriminated against in terms of services is widespread. In Vredendal-North : ‘the services that the community need and these needs were named in a GOP-meeting, they don’t look at those needs. If you go to the other areas, you will get a different picture’. In Oliver Tambo ‘it is all the fault of the municipality which mistreats black people. They never come here to collect the rubbish but if it were in town, they would do it immediately’. Accordingly, this dissatisfaction is often linked to payment for services, pointing to widespread consciousness of consumers’ financial responsibilities. ‘(W)e are paying rent but we don’t know for what. We don’t have services, no electricity, no water...’ (OT). Complaints were also made regarding the distance of schools and clinics from the areas of the poor, and accordingly regarding the cost of transportation.

As partners, the poor are marginalised

The poor refer rarely to development-oriented organisations within which they participate. The exception is in Vredendal-North: ‘(P)rojects are managed and certain groups within the community, those who have close relationships with the council

members or the heads of Department are offered jobs opportunities, they are appointed as puppet leaders or puppet managers. But at the end of the day people who were not even involved in the project get all the credit and praise. When the (vegetable-garden) project showed some profit, there were two white people, the town clerk and one of the council members, they got all the credit and the workers were not even mentioned, no one even thanked them’.

Faced with such comprehensive social exclusion in their towns, the poor do appear to develop strategies of coping and of survival. The first is an instrumental view of criminal activity. ‘(W)hen we are hungry, we think about crime because there is nothing else to do’ (OT). ‘The government can’t blame you to go to crime if you think without any food in your stomach’ (AP). ‘(I)f you look at the crimes that are committed ... a lot of these crimes are committed to get recognition’ (HC). ‘If we are a group of men and we know that every Friday the people get paid, we are going to rob the people and this leads to gangsterism’ (VN).

A related strategy motivated by perceptions of police inefficiency and racial bias (MB, HB, AP) and aimed at defence against local criminal activity is vigilantism. ‘(W)hen I find the people who are doing this (stealing from the spaza shop), I’ll take the law into my hands because I am tired of the police’ (MB). ‘So I agree with people taking the law in their own hands. The government must hand that person over to the community so that the community can punish him’ (VN). In the third place, scapegoating and xenophobic attitudes emerged within these narratives (AP & VN). ‘The problem here in SA, there are a lot of foreigners. Foreigners take the jobs but they don’t give any votes’ (AP).

As noted above, the Vredendal North FG was an exception in that it discussed organised community initiatives to address ‘problems that the council neglects’. This project was described in the following terms ‘We as a community have now decided to do our own things, we established organisations which are *anti-political* to reach our goals’ (emphasis added).

THE MIDDLE INCOME

In contrast to the compartmentalized affluent residents and the marginalized poor, middle income local people speak regularly on behalf of their local community and appeal repeatedly for community action. They thereby appear to make up the mainstay of civil society in their town. ‘(T)here are no civic organisations, people are not united and the community is not pulling together. Where there is no civic organisation, there is no ‘core’ that is looking at the progress ... they should be working together so that we can make it...for the sake of our kids’ (KB). ‘(A)ll of us have a responsibility, if we go neighbour to neighbour, from street to street, and we see it as my neighbour’s child is my responsibility and my neighbour’s safety and the safety of her house is also my responsibility - we share each others interests’ (KC).

This attitude of enlightened self-interest is reflected in their accommodating albeit

critical attitude to local leaders. ‘(T)he authority appointed and handling the money, didn’t go and look for experienced people to run this (housing) project. And so ... coloureds people who thought they were experienced enough to run this project came to Kylemore, and they gave houses to the people. So if I look to the houses in Kylemore, it is the people of Kylemore’s own fault that they have these houses ... The people who were in charge of the houses were totally inexperienced’ (KC) ‘(T)he government can do so much if the government can play its role also. But also I don’t know how because ... when I was making my own research in Kayamandi, I heard that sometimes the people who are up there, who are representing Kayamandi to the government, it’s like there are many conflicts so they don’t work out something that can work for the people’ (KB). ‘(I)t is our people that sit there and those people had to transform so fast, I think most of our council members do not have the necessary skill to really earn their place on the council ... what really happens there is that those people are mostly headed by the so-called informed and then make uninformed decisions’ (WC).

This shared sentiment of belonging is closely allied to shared religious faith in Kylemore and Wellington and leads in all three FG narratives to calls for community self-help. In Kylemore, ‘when we talk about shebeens, the Church should play a more important role because when one member of the Church has a problem, according to the Bible it is the Church responsibility...’. In Kayamandi, ‘the people who come from the Eastern Cape, the rural areas, are not willing to take responsibilities to progress, to fight for things to happen. People must take responsibilities for their lives because they can’t always count on the government. Mandela opened the door but it is up to us to enter.’ The self-help theme spills over into community involvement in combating crime: ‘(I)f people really feel unsafe, then they must find a solution themselves together with a different organisation (such as) community policing ... at the end of the day, we are responsible for our own pain’ (WC). ‘We have leaders in Kylemore, we have tax-payers...we must stand up as a community and say enough is enough’ (KC). The other form of combating crime is by appealing to moral values: ‘families are not a strong point in our communities anymore’ (WC), while in Kayamandi, respondents argued that youngsters do not respect the elderly anymore.

As active members of civil society in their towns, the middle income group express clear political preferences and view the state both as partner as well as protagonist. ‘Isn’t this the opportunity to talk to the government?’ asks one respondent in Wellington when lottery funds were raised. ‘Before with Apartheid, we were dissatisfied with the government, there were marches, people were tortured and people were locked up. Now we have another government and if we really are honest we will admit that the government is making a mess of things. Now why should we leave the government doing this? We are actually giving the government the mandate to just go ahead. I believe that if a government, it doesn’t matter what it looks like, does not do his job, then we must go over to civil disobedience’ (WC). Similarly in Kylemore, ‘there must be a definite structural plan in this town that we, as people, can draw...because the government must listen to the people, to what we want in our town and what we don’t want in our town, like for example, we do not want people to

smuggle (alcohol). I think this is the way we should take action.'

Simultaneously, meaningful racial identities persist largely as a result of continuing residential segregation and associated inequalities. '(T)his is a fact, the white areas get better treatment than us in terms of services and other things...when you look where most people are in Wellington, most of the children are that side of Market Street and most of the work is done the other side' (WC). 'Kayamandi is a very small area in the whole well-developed Stellenbosch so (its isolation) has been done deliberately just to draw a line between the poor blacks and the rich whites' (KB). '(T)he system of the government is corrupt because some people are still advantaged. The white people previously had an advantage and they still have an advantage. They have a bigger advantage than us. They want to use School Street for their trucks...at the same time, in the white residential area, trucks are not allowed to move through there...so the people succeed in doing all kinds of things without being noticed...' (KC).

Faced with continuing sentiments of separation and social exclusion of the poor in their towns, the middle income group also develop coping strategies. These strategies differ dramatically from those of the poor since middle income local people reveal substantial sources of self-confidence. By taking the interests of their community to heart, they propose action through community organisations such as tax-payers' associations (Kylemore) and Employment Schemes to develop the skills of the unemployed (Kylemore, Wellington and Kayamandi). Accordingly, strategies include lobbying municipalities, organising and empowering community, and if necessary, civil disobedience. Ultimately, belief in such strategies led a respondent in the Kayamandi FG to exhort that 'we must all do something to make this country work'.

STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE LOCAL SPHERE: THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNS

The second phase of local government transformation - aimed at introducing participative and developmental local government - is mired in country-wide problems. Three will be noted:

- '... two-thirds of municipalities are financially highly stressed and ... one third are not financially viable...'
- '... more than half of local authorities are administratively not up to standard and many require immediate help in terms of financial controls and management...'
- '... people in different types of residential area are not paying for rates and services every month...' (Bernstein 1998:298).

Substantial evidence of dissatisfaction with local government activities has been given above. What does this imply for policy regarding local participation, for proposed cooperation and conflict in the local sphere between state and civil society?

Hirschman's model of loyalty, voice, and exit - of simply stick it out, of expressing

dissatisfaction, or of quitting - is particularly useful when applied to people who are experiencing decline in the institutions within which they operate. Under such conditions of decline, simply sticking it out appears to be the worst option. Accordingly, Hirschman makes much of the choice between, and relationship between, voice and exit. He argues that there is a cost to using voice and that there therefore needs to be a reasonable expectation that voice will make a difference. Accordingly, the privileged are more inclined than rank-and-file to use voice since they typically are both better organised (and thereby able to maximise the impact of voice) and more influential (and thereby able to elicit more attention). The threat of exit moreover is often used as part of voice and is effective to the extent that the exit of the people involved is judged to be a loss by the organisation, in our case by the local council and municipality. On the other hand, exit can constitute a difficult choice. Exit from a community usually takes the form of escape by an individual notably through upward social mobility.⁴ The alternative is for community members to stick together and develop a collective voice aimed at countering decline in the community. The underlying reason for this option is loyalty to this community, established by shared values and networks. When a person expresses loyalty to an organisation, to exit becomes expensive for it brands the person as disloyal. Such a person accordingly when deeply dissatisfied is more inclined to use voice.

An application of these ideas to the narratives of the three groups of local people we have identified above proves useful. Moreover, since an interest in public affairs is a fundamental precondition for public involvement,⁵ narratives identifying such interest point strongly in the direction of public participation and their absence from such narratives to the likelihood of apathy or, at least, of disinterest. Indeed as Klandermans and others (2000) argue, interest in public affairs points toward involvement in public affairs, and identification of group interest toward collective involvement.⁶

Affluent local people draw little meaning from public participation in the local sphere. Though dependent along with everyone else on local services, they appear satisfied with their delivery, both since they are able to pay more for quality services and because they are able to privatise a number of them if this becomes necessary. Accordingly, though they may be aware of decline in the state-civil society relationship in their towns, this barely affects their lives. They reserve their voice for national matters which they perceive to affect their lives much more. At this level, as Afrikaners, they situate themselves in a wider ethnic community from whence, they believe, voice carries collective weight. Exit through emigration, albeit an unpalatable option, remains a viable last resort.

Poor local people also draw minimal meaning from public participation in the local sphere. Since their social exclusion individualises and marginalizes them, their voice is faint and of little influence. Their ability to exit from state services is ruled out for these services are essential to their survival strategies and they have no means to buy more expensive private services. The poor accordingly find themselves in a double bind since to menace with voice or to threaten exit carries little weight with local councillors and officials. These local people neither belong to an organised opposition

movement nor are able to withhold substantial payments. Their strategy, typically chosen on an individual basis, is one of opting out of civil society (into criminal and vigilante activities, for example).

Middle Income local people form the bastion of public participation at local level. They express deep loyalty to local civil society and urge the use of voice through a variety of stakeholder organisations to promote both conflict-from-within and cooperation with council and municipality. Their status and their optimism strengthen one another for they believe that their collective voice will make a difference in a situation which they believe can improve.

These broadbrush profiles of residential groups in SA towns confirm earlier research results: while race forms an integral part of rank-and-file discussions of themselves and those around them, it rarely emerges as their primary meaning (see Bekker *et al.* 2000). Discussions on provincial and national matters reveal no meaningful provincial and weak national identity. It was the local that emerged as primary in this earlier 1999 research. The one unanticipated result here is the comprehensive and recent politicisation of White Afrikaner respondents during the year 2000. Earlier research suggested that this group had retreated into ethnic domesticity.

These profiles also strongly suggest that developmental local government faces an uphill task, at least in South African towns similar to those sampled here. Civil society at local level appears to be incoherent. There was no significant discussion in any of the FGs on organisations such as civics, forums or trade unions that made up the core of civil society during the country's period of political transition. In the affluent group, religious and linguistic identity, though strong, is oriented toward a wider ethnic solidarity rather than toward the local town. Among the poor, neither appear as important. In the middle income group, on the other hand, religious belief is not only meaningful but also perceived to be an important means to community action. Participation in state-civil society relations by residents in the local sphere accordingly appears to be minimal among the poor - the very grouping development activities target - and among the White affluent - the most influential minority in these towns, at least in economic terms. The middle income group stands in for local civil society and though they express confidence and display zeal, without more comprehensive participation, councillors and municipal officials will find the goal of public participation elusive.

If public participation remains out of reach, will this disappoint local councillors and their municipal officials? Two more insights gleaned from Hirschman again prove useful. The first is the possibility that to exit may lead to using voice-from-without, to working for change outside the confines of the institution. The case of the community organisation in Vredendal North that intends to become overtly *anti-political* appears to have this kind of potential.⁷ 'Anti-political' points to the intention of seeking development beyond the municipal sphere, beyond developmental local government. If seen to be successful, this would pose a distinct threat to the local council and its municipality.

On the other hand, Barry (1974:106), in his analysis of Hirschman's work, argues that 'under certain circumstances exit may operate on those running a collectivity not as an incentive to improve but *as a license to deteriorate*' (emphasis added). Affluent local people potentially make up the most vocal section of local consumers, the most reliable payers for local services, and the most economically influential group in their town. They are also the group least likely to direct their collective voice toward council and municipality. They are the least likely to rock the boat. Under circumstances of financial stress and administrative incompetence, such a situation may well be welcomed by council and municipality alike. 'Better leave them out than bring them in' may well be the motto. By withholding voice in the local sphere, affluent white residents may well be aggravating the current crisis of local government in South African towns.

Do these conclusions imply that developmental local government policy and its participative planning component, in particular, are defective? In the sense used within this policy, 'community' does not appear to exist at local urban level. If this idea is understood to refer to a group of people who have together constructed a subjectively shared and valued common sentiment, then it certainly seems to be absent in South African towns. The quest for participative planning, therefore, has little to do with engaging members of the local 'community'. Rather, it has to do with establishing and employing means of communication between different communities and groupings within a town and subsequently with attempting to extend civil society across these disparate groupings. Public policy constructed with this notion of 'community' is not only wrong but may well be dangerous. It is appropriate to keep in mind Frederick Cooper's (1994:1544) caution that '(t)hose who find in the notions of 'community' and 'new social movement' a welcome antidote to one sort of oppression need to worry about the other forms of oppression that lie within them'. Until 'community' is deconstructed within the urban populations of South Africa's towns, developmental local government policy may well be doing a disservice to many in these populations.

ENDNOTES

1. It is important to observe that this call by government for participative local government did not begin with the 1998 White Paper. In 1995, fully knowledgeable of the volatile nature of land claims and tenure difficulties in different parts of the country, the central government legislated the Development Facilitation Act (Act 67 of 1995). This Act though calling for top-down implementation, did encourage community participation in planning initiatives both at local as well as at intergovernmental levels. The Western Cape Provincial Government amended the Act for implementation in this province and IDP here predates the White Paper. See Smith 2000.

2. See Mamdani (1996:13-16) and Shils (1991). We use the concept of civil society to include actors ranging from individuals to non-government and profit-making

organisations in the public sphere, falling between the family and the state. Civil society, moreover, whilst autonomous of the state, cannot exist independent of the state for it is the state itself that guarantees its autonomy.

3. Abbreviations are defined in Table 2 in Appendix 2.

4. Hirschman gives as an example of individual exit through socio-economic promotion African Americans in the United States.

5. Putnam 2000:35. According to Putnam, ‘political knowledge and interest in public affairs are critical preconditions for more active forms of involvement. If you don’t know the rules of the game and the players and don’t care about the outcome, you’re unlikely to try playing yourself’.

6. See Klandermans et al (2000). According to the authors, ‘the more people identify with (...) other people, the more they are inclined to act as a member of that category’. Quoting Turner, they argue that “identification with a group makes people more prepared to act as a member of that group’.

7. A case reminiscent of Castells’ identification of resistance identities as emergent in the current era of globalisation. These identities serve as strategies of collective survival. See Castells 1997.

APPENDIX 1 METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Research was completed during August and September 2000, a few months before the second democratic local government elections which took place in December. Principles guiding the selection of focus groups have been given in the main body of the paper. The constitution of the focus group began with the identification of a coordinator within the milieu of the focus group. This milieu coordinator was requested to approach between eight and ten potential adult participants from the milieu. The coordinator was also requested to select participants with varying ages as well as approximately equal numbers of women and men. Discussions were planned to last approximately one hour. The FG venue was selected on the basis of a location known to the participants. In four of twelve cases, the venue was a private residence. Other venues included clinics, community and municipal halls, a coffee shop, a shebeen and a school classroom.

A written copy of the three prompts to be used was made available to the milieu coordinator before the FG was convened and the coordinator was requested to establish which language would be preferred by participants. Participants were also asked for permission to tape-record discussions. Two members of a four member research team managed the discussion process of each FG. The team comprised two Afrikaans-speakers, one with a Coloured and one with a White background; a Xhosa-speaker hailing from the Eastern Cape and a research coordinator from the European Community who has depth knowledge of South Africa. The three South African

members are all graduate students. The research coordinator attended all FGs, each of which was introduced and managed by a second team member selected on the basis of FG preferred language and shared racial background. No remuneration was offered to participants. Refreshments were provided during discussions, and English transcriptions of discussions were completed immediately after each meeting.

Discussions ranged from 40 to 90 minutes and were, in some cases, followed by face-to-face discussions with a few individual participants. A FG with farm workers in the West Coast was also held. Results were not considered appropriate for this paper. Though three prompts were used, participants were not discouraged from pursuing a particular theme. Accordingly, few FGs allocated equal discussion time to each theme. In fact, as is clear from the main paper, although most time was spent pursuing issues related to the local theme during the poor and middle income FGs, it was not the case during the affluent FGs.

Information produced in this manner is qualitative: both the urban residential areas as well as the towns sampled, whilst broadly covering both ethnic as well as class groupings in the Western Cape province, are not strictly representative. Similarly, FG data collected by using three standardised prompts and subsequent non-directive techniques, whilst allowing participants to voice their opinions in their selected language with minimal researcher influence, are not strictly representative of the socio-economic groupings within which they have been classified. Generalisability to these socio-economic groupings, to the province, and more extensively, to the country as a whole, is limited. Simultaneously, comparable results from earlier work done using the same techniques, as well as research team comments on interpretation lead us to claim that our findings are valid within a qualitative research context.

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APPENDIX 2 TABLE 2 OF FGS ABBREVIATIONS

Name (Former Group Area)	Town	Abbreviation
Mbekweni (B)	Paarl	MB
Oliver Tambo (B)	Wellington	OT
Avila Park (B)	Vredendal	AP
Heidelberg (B)	Heidelberg	HB
Vredendal- North (C)	Vredendal	VN
Heidelberg (C)	Heidelberg	HC
Kayamandi (B)	Stellenbosch	KB
Wellington (C)	Wellington	WC
Kylemore (C)	Stellenbosch	KC
Stellenbosch (W)	Stellenbosch	SW
Strandfontein (W)	West Coast	STW
Heidelberg (W)	Heidelberg	HW

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